The 16th Sermon

A

# SERMON

Preached on the 28th. of *June*,

AT

S^t *GILES* in the *Fields*,

BY

# John Sharp, D.D.

Arch-Biſhop of *YORK* Elect,

## At his leaving ye Pariſh.

Publiſhed at the Requeſt of the GENTLEMEN of the VESTRY.

**The Third Edition.**

*LONDON*:

Printed for *Walter Kettilby*, at the *Biſhops Head* in S. *Paul's* Church-Yard. 1691.

A

# SERMON

Preached on the 25th of June,

AT

SCALES in the Fields,

BY

## John Sharp, D.D.

Arch-Bishop of YORK Elect,

## And his Learning & Parts,

Published at the Request of the GENTLEMEN of the VESTRY.

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## Philip. iv. 8.

*Finally, Brethren, whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report; if there be any vertue, and if there be any praise, think on these things.*

I Have the two last Lord's Days, made it my business to treat of this Text, in a way that I thought did most tend to the informing your Judgments: And to that purpose I have raised several Observations, and drawn several Inferences from it.

I mean now to Treat of it in another way, and to apply my self wholly to the pressing you to the Practice of it.

And indeed the Nature of the Sermon I am to make, doth call for this from me. For I am now to take my leave of you; this being the last time in all probability that I shall Preach among you as your Minister: And therefore I suppose good Advice and Exhortation will more become me at this time, than a close Discourse upon a Text.

And yet, my Text doth afford matter enough, without straining it, for such a purpose: Nor indeed

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do I know a Text in the Bible, that I could more willingly pitch upon to leave with you, as the last advice I would give you, and as the Sum and Conclusion of my Preaching among you; than these Words of St. *Paul* I have now read to you.

Let me therefore at this time address my self to you all, as the Apostle here did at the conclusion of his Epistle to the *Philippians*, *Finally Brethren whatsoever things are true*, &c.

Here are a great many things recommended by the Apostle to our thoughts and pursuit. If we would make a distribution of them, I believe they will all naturally enough fall under these *Four* Heads. For the *things* here recommended are not so many as the *words* by which they are expresst; there being several Words used in this Enumeration, that are of the same importance, and seem to express much the same thing. The *Four* Heads I would reduce them to are these,

I. *A constant Adherence to the true Religion.*

II. *Honesty and Justice in our Dealings.*

III. *A Life of strict* Purity, *in opposition to* Sensuality and Lewdness.

IV. *The adorning the Doctrine of God we do profess, by the constant Practice of every other thing that is Virtuous or Commendable, or well thought of by Mankind.*

This, as I take it, is a fair account of the Parts of this Text: and these I shall make the Heads of my following Exhortation.

I begin with the first. *Finally my Brethren whatsoever things are true, think on those things.* The

The *Truths* that S. *Paul* here exhorts them to think on are undoubtedly the *Truths* of the Gospel of Jesus Christ which he had delivered to them. These he would have them to think upon, and persist in, and never to be prevailed upon by any Temptation to depart from them.

Let me now apply this Advice of his to you. It is the particular Blessing of God to this Kingdom, and an inestimable Blessing it is, that he has not only vouchsafed us the Light of his Gospel for many years, but He has also taken Care that the *Truths* of it should be delivered to us with greater Purity and Sincerity, and freer from the mixtures of Errour than to most, I was going to say, than to any other People in the World.

If it lay in your way to make observations concerning the State of Religion in other Countries; nay or but to read the Accounts that are given of it: I am sure you would be convinced how exceedingly happy we of this Church are, above all the other Churches in Christendom.

O therefore let us all firmly adhere to the *Truths* we have been taught; to the *Truths* we have hitherto made Profession of. And let us firmly adhere to that *Church* which hath held forth these *Truths* to us, and taught us this Profession.

We do not pretend that any Church is Infallible, and therefore not ours: But this we dare say and we can justifie; that if we take our measures concerning the Truths of Religion from the Rules of the Holy Scriptures, and the Platform of the Primitive Churches,

the Church of *England* is undoubtedly both as to Doctrine and Worship, the Purest Church that is at this day in the World; the most Orthodox in Faith, and the freest on the one hand from *Idolatry* and *Superstition*, and on the other hand from *Freakishness* and *Enthusiasm* of any now extant.

Nay I do farther say with great seriousness, and as one that expects to be called to account at the dreadful Tribunal of God for what I now say, if I do not speak in sincerity: That I do in my Conscience believe, that if the Religion of Jesus Christ, as it is deliver'd in the New Testament, be the true Religion (as I am certain it is:) Then the Communion of the Church of *England* is a safe way to Salvation, and the safest of any I know in the World.

And therefore I do exhort you all in the Name of God, stedfastly to hold and to persevere in this Communion.

Here you have the *Things that are true*. Think of them and embrace them heartily; and Live and Die in the Profession of them. This is the Doctrine I have always Taught you, and by the Grace of God I mean to Practise accordingly.

II. The next thing I have to recommend to you from these words of the Apostle is Universal *Honesty* and *Justice* and *Righteousness* in your Conversation. *Whatsoever things* (saith he) *are true, whatsoever things are honest; whatsoever things are just*; think on these things.

You see I join these two words *Honest* and *Just* together, as importing the same thing. Tho yet I

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am aware that the word we here render *Honeſt* is often uſed in another ſignification, that is to ſay for *Grave* or *Venerable*: But ſince that other ſignification falls in moſt properly under my laſt Head, I wave it here and take the word as our Tranſlation renders it.]

Indeed it is in vain to expect any advantage from our profeſſion of the *Truth*, if we be not ſincerely *Juſt* and *Honeſt* in our Actions.

Whoſoever can allow himſelf in the practice of any diſhoneſt, knaviſh, indirect Dealing, let that Man be never ſo Orthodox in his Belief and Opinions; yet I am ſure he is no true Chriſtian.

O therefore let me exhort you all, whatever Intereſts you have to ſerve; whatever Dealings you are ingaged in, to be always ſtrictly *Juſt* and *Upright* in your Converſation. Uſe no Tricks, practiſe no ill Arts for the ſerving your ends, but in all your tranſactions with Men, deal with that Simplicity and Integrity and good Conſcience, that becomes thoſe who would be accounted the Diſciples of Him who was the moſt Innocent, the moſt Sincere, and the leaſt Intrigueing Perſon in the World.

Aſſure your ſelves no diſhoneſty can proſper long. Whatever turns you may ſerve by it at preſent, yet you will bitterly repent of it ſometime or other. But Righteouſneſs and Juſtice doth eſtabliſh a mans ways. And the upright Man, tho he is not always the richeſt, yet always walketh moſt ſurely. And as for the final event of things; Remember this that God Almighty has pronounced that *no Unrighteous men, no Covetous, no Liars, no Extortioners, ſhall enter into the Kingdom of Heaven*. But to go on.

III. The next thing I have to exhort you to from the words of my Text is the Practice of *Purity*. For after the Apoſtle hath recommended the purſuit of *things* that are *true*, and the things that are *honeſt* and *juſt*, he next adds the things that are *pure*. Meaning hereby that we ſhould ſtudy to be pure and chaſt and temperate both in our Hearts and Lives; avoiding all Exceſſes, and Lewdneſs, and Senſuality.

And if he thought it convenient in that Age of ſtrictneſs and ſeverity and devotion, to put the Chriſtians in mind of this: I am ſure it is not only convenient but neceſſary to do it, in this Age of ours, when Luxury and Debauchery, when Whoredom and Drunkenneſs, and all ſorts of Vices that are contrary to *Purity*, are grown to that height among us, that we ſeem to defie God Almighty by our impudent Practice of them, and provoke Him to give us up to Deſtruction.

I pray God make the whole Nation deeply ſenſible of the Folly and Wickedneſs, as well as of the danger and dreadful Conſequences of theſe Practices. And as for you who are here preſent, let me beſpeak you in the Words of the Apoſtle; *Dearly Beloved, I beſeech you as Strangers and Pilgrims, to abſtain from fleſhly Luſts, which war againſt the Soul.* I beſeech you as you have any Honor for your Lord and Maſter, as you have any regard to the preſervation of a Senſe of Religion in your Minds, as you have any concern for your Health, for your Eſtates, for your Families; as you have any reſpect to the Publick, that Effeminacy and Sottiſhneſs and Diſeaſes may not be entailed upon our Poſterity; laſtly as you love your own

Souls

Souls, and hope ever to see the face of God in Heaven, learn to live Soberly, learn to live Chastly, learn to practise Purity and Temperance in all your Conversation. Avoid Whoredom and Drunkenness as you would the Plague, for certainly they are the worst of Plagues to them that use them: For other Plagues do only put our Bodies in danger, but these do endanger both our Souls and Bodies. Nay as to the one (I mean our Souls) they will prove certain inevitable Destruction without Repentance and Reformation.

I know these things are made slight Matters of by a great many among us. But assure your selves God will not account them so; it is certain he will not, if we may believe his Word; for it is there told us expresly that *Whoremongers and Adulterers God will judge.* And withal, that *neither Adulterers, nor Fornicators, nor unclean Persons, nor Drunkards shall ever inherit the Kingdom of God or of Christ.*

IV. I proceed to the last Head of Advice that is given in my Text. The Apostle having instanced in *Three* things necessary to be daily thought upon and pursued by all Christians, *viz. Truth* and *Honesty* and *Purity*, leaves off to meddle any farther with particulars, and sums up the rest of his Advice in generals. And that sum comes to this, that as we are Christians we should not only take care of the three forementioned things, but should make it our business to improve our selves in every other sort of Virtue; nay in every other sort of thing that is *Praise-worthy*, or that is well esteemed of among Mankind. So that really it should be the endeavor of our Lives to render our selves as excellent and as exemplary for all sorts of a-

miable Qualities as it is possible for men to be in this World.

This I take to be the full meaning of those *four* expressions that follow in my Text, *Whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report, if there be any Virtue, if there be any Praise, think of these things.*

And now Brethren, see from hence what your Obligations are. You that have such a glorious Light vouchsafed you; such unvaluable Promises, such mighty Assistances made over to you by the Gospel of Christ: You must in Reason imagine that in return of these great Advantages, great things are expected from you.

It will not satisfie your Engagements, that you do believe and profess the Gospel, that you do no wrong to your Neighbours, that you are neither given to Lewdness nor Drunkenness, (tho yet even these, as the World goes, are very great things, and could all Men that profess Christianity truly say this of themselves, we should soon see Heaven upon Earth) But your Christianity obliges you to aspire after greater things; you must get your selves possessed of the whole Circle of Virtues; you must be *Kind* and *Charitable*, as well as *Just* and *Honest*; you must be *Modest* and *Meek* and *Humble*, as well as *Temperate* and *Chast*.

Nay not only so, but you are to labour after all these several Virtues, in the full Latitude and Extent of them, even to that degree that every thing which hath but the *appearance of Evil* is to be avoided by you. You are not only to abstain from Acts of Injustice, but even from doing a *hard* thing to any one; you are not only to keep your selves within the known

Limits

Limits of Temperance and Chaſtity, but to avoid all thoſe things that border upon the Vices oppoſite thereunto, and ſo as to all other inſtances; if any thing be of *ill Report*, and looks infamouſly to the ſober part of Mankind, why that very Conſideration is enough to deter you from the Practice of it; For you are to recommend your Religion to all the Men in the World, by all the ways that are poſſible.

In a Word you are to endeavour to be as free from blame in your whole Converſation as you poſſibly can, and not only ſo, but to be as good, and to do as much good as your Circumſtances will allow you.

This now is to be a Chriſtian indeed; by thus endeavouring you truly walk worthy of that high and heavenly Calling, wherewith you are called, and you do (as the Apoſtle adviſes) *adorn the Doctrine of God in all things*; and happy, extreamly happy are they that do thus, for great is their Reward: Great even in this World in the ſolid Peace and Aſſurance of Gods Favor which they here enjoy, and which indeed far exceeds all the Bleſſings that the Earth can afford; but exceedingly great in the Life to come, when Jeſus Chriſt ſhall come with all the Powers of Heaven to do Honor to thoſe that have thus here honoured him.

Thus have I gone through all the parts of my Text, but I do not think that I ought ſo to leave it. I have given you an account of the things that St. *Paul* hath here directed us to, to be the main purſuit of our Lives. But I think likewiſe it will be proper to ſpeak ſomething of the Methods of that purſuit, or the means

means which we are to observe, if we would practise this Text; and here I am to begin anew with my Advices. Several things I have to represent upon this Occasion and to exhort you to. I am not much solicitous, whether they strictly belong to my Argument or no. But I desire to leave them with you, as things that I judge to be very useful, and which I wish may be ever remembred by you.

And the *First* thing I would exhort you to is this, *That you would endeavour to possess your Minds with a hearty Sense of God Almighty, and the absolute Necessity of being seriously Religious.*

I do not mention this, as if I thought there was any need to caution you against *Atheism* or *Infidelity*, for I hope not many among us are inclined that way. Mankind are naturally disposed to believe a God and Religion, and since through God's Blessing it is *Christianity* that is the Religion of our Country, and in which we have been all Educated: I look upon an *Atheist* or an *Infidel* among us, to be a sort of *Prodigy*, a strange unusual Creature, vastly different from those of his own Kind.

But here is the thing. Though most of us profess Religion and the true Religion, yet many of us have no lively or hearty Sense of it. We use Religion as we do our Cloths. They are very convenient, nay perhaps necessary, and therefore we wear them, and for the particular form or mode of them we follow, as to that, the Custom of the Countrey where we live. Yet as the Cloths we wear do not alter the Complexion or Features of our Body, so neither doth the

the Religion we Profeſs any more affect the Temper of our Souls. We ſerve our ſelves in both Caſes of the outward Conveniencies that are to be had by them, but we are ſtill the ſame to our Perſons both as outward and inward Lineaments.

But alas this is a very ſorry way of being Religious and will do us no great kindneſs. We may perhaps reap ſome ſecular advantages by it, but yet even the very trouble and pains it puts us to, do equal the Conveniencies we have from it. The Men that live thus, are juſt ſerved like thoſe that work in rich Mines. They are daily imployed about Gold and Silver or Gems, and they work hard, and they have their days wages for their Labour, but they are not a whit the richer for the Treaſures that come into their hands.

Your Religion will never ſerve you to any extraordinary purpoſes, till your Hearts be affected with it as well as your Underſtandings. Let me therefore adviſe you, as you love either your Happineſs in this World, or in the next, make it your principal care to get a lively and vigorous Senſe of God impreſſed upon your Minds. And look upon it as the greateſt Intereſt you have to carry on, the greateſt Buſineſs you have to do in this World (as it really is) to approve your ſelves to this God by a ſincere endeavour in all your Converſation, to walk as his Son Jeſus Chriſt hath taught you. If you do this, you will certainly find the Sweet and Comfort of it both here and hereafter.

When all is ſaid, it is a vain thing for any man to expect a tolerable eaſie paſſage through this World, unleſs he have the Hopes of Gods Favour to ſupport him under the Multitude of evil Accidents which the State of Humane Life will neceſſarily expoſe him to. And as for the other World, without theſe Hopes he is perfectly loſt: And to be able to entertain any rational Hopes of God's Bleſſing and Favour, is

a very vain thing likewiſe, unleſs we make it our buſineſs with our whole Hearts and Souls to ſerve and pleaſe and obey Him.

There are a great many Rules and Maxims that we uſe to give to our Friends or our Children for the making their Fortunes, and I cannot deny but they are exceeding good ones. Thus for inſtance, we adviſe them to get a true underſtanding of their Buſineſs, and to purſue it diligently, to keep out of ill Company, to avoid Drinking or Gaming and Lewdneſs, and to ſtudy the Tempers and Tumors of Mankind, and to learn to apply themſelves dexterouſly to thoſe they have occaſion to converſe with; why theſe and ſuch others are excellent Rules and moſt worthy of all Men to be ſtudied and practiſed. But ſtill there is one Rule above all theſe, and without which all the other will ſignifie very little to the making a Mans Life eaſie and comfortable; and that is to preſerve a lively ſenſe of God upon our Spirits, to have his Fear always before our Eyes, to love him above all things, to value his Favor more than Life, and to dread his Diſpleaſure as the worſt of Evils. If we can but once get our Souls into this frame, we have done our Buſineſs both for this World and for Eternity; All the other particular Rules and Advices will be in a great meaſure ſuperfluous; for he that is poſſeſſed of this good Principle will of courſe naturally fall into the practice of them. And beſides this Fear and Love of God in our Hearts, as it is the moſt effectual means, according to the uſual Diſpoſition of the Divine Providence, to put us into good Circumſtances of Living; ſo it is the only means of making our Circumſtances happy to us, if they be good; or of making them eaſie and ſupportable, if they be bad.

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I do therefore moſt earneſtly recommend it to you, as you deſire that either you or yours may proſper, nay, as you would not be very miſerable; be not contented with a ſuperficial outſide Religion, but affect your minds as deeply as is poſſible with a ſenſe of God, and what you owe to him; and endeavour to impreſs the ſame ſenſe upon your Friends and Children, and all that are about you. The truth of it is, ſo much doth our preſent happineſs, as well as our future, depend upon this belief of God, and love to him, and hopes of his favour; that were it not for this, the preſent World with all the imaginary pleaſures and glories of it would appear to all wiſe and good men, not only an empty dull unſatisfactory place, but a diſmal melancholy priſon. If it was ſuppos'd that all things here were the effects of blind Chance, or fatal Neceſſity, and that there were no Wiſdom and Goodneſs that did preſide over the World, or took care of Mankind; no conſidering man could deſire to live here.

The *Second* thing I would leave with you, is this, That after you have got into your minds a hearty ſence of God and his Providence, and his preſence and goodneſs; ſo as that you mean to make it the buſineſs of your lives to recommend your ſelves to him: you would in the next place, take care to keep up that ſenſe by *a conſtant and daily Worſhip of him.*

For God's sake, and for your own Souls sake, do not neglect your Prayers. You must never think that God will bless you, if you do not make a Conscience of daily paying him your tribute of Honour and Worship.

Be sure therefore, you be constant in your private Devotions. As you every day receive the renewed pledges of God's love and goodness towards you in a thousand instances: so let every day your affection and gratitude be express'd to him, by hearty Prayer and Thanksgiving. This is absolutely necessary to be done, as I have often told you, if you mean to preserve any hearty sense of Religion in your minds.

But besides this I have another thing to recommend to all those that have Families. They are Heads and Governours of a *Society*. For indeed the first notion of *Society* is that of a *Family*. Every Family is a little Kingdom, and every Kingdom is or ought to be a great Family. Now is it natural, is it decent, that there should be any Society upon earth wherein God should not be owned and worshipped? And yet woe be to us, how many thousands of Families are there in this Kingdom, nay, I am afraid, even in and about this City, wherein God is not so much as named in publick, unless perhaps by the way of affront, by the way of *Cursing* or *Swearing*.

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We deservedly complain of the great looseness and profaneness and irreligion that hath overspread the face of this Nation. O! I doubt a great deal of the blame of it lies upon the Housholders, the Masters of Families among us. If they would take better care of their Children and Servants, and let them know what it is to worship God, things would not be so bad among us. But how can we expect better, when there is no Religion either taught or practised in our houses. We give our domesticks opportunities enough, of learning all our bad qualities; but we give them none of learning our good ones, if we have any.

They see us offending God by many rash words and sinful actions; but they do not see us repenting, and asking God's pardon by our solemn Prayers and applications to the Throne of Grace. Let us therefore seriously lay this point to heart. I am sure we have just cause to do it. Let us bring Religion into our Families, and not be contented that once a week some of our people in their turns should hear something of it. Let us every day call our family together, and pay our common tribute of Prayer and Praise for the mercies we do daily receive in common. Methinks our Saviour seemed to have a respect to this very duty, and to charge it mightily upon us, when he made us that gracious pro-

miſe that even, *where two or three were gathered together in his name, there would he be in the midſt of them.* Sure, his words have moſt naturally a reſpect to the worſhip of God that is perform'd in Families. As hath likewiſe the very contrivance of the Lord's Prayer: all the Petitions thereof being ſo framed, as to be moſt proper to be ſaid by more than one, and yet too when we have ſhut our doors for that purpoſe. But,

*Thirdly*, As you ought to take care about the worſhip of God in your Cloſets and in your Families; let me add, that it equally concerns you to frequent the more publick worſhip of God in his own houſe. It is a bad ſign of ſome very ill Principle or other, for any man to be much a ſtranger there. Even to have the liberty and opportunity of worſhipping God in publick, is one of the greateſt bleſſings and priviledges that we can have in this World; and hath by good men always been ſo accounted. Now ſure, if we have this Notion of it, we ſhall think our ſelves mightily concerned to take all opportunities that come in our way, not only on Sundays, but on other days, of reſorting to the publick Aſſemblies, and joyning with them in the ſolemn ſacrifice of Prayer and Thankſgiving; and thinking it a good day to us wherein we have thus employed our ſelves.

The Sacrifices of this kind that we offer to God

God with an honeſt and devout mind, we cannot doubt will always find acceptance, and produce their effects; nay perhaps when our Cloſet-prayers will not. For there are certainly more promiſes to *publick* prayers than to *private* ones. Tho' yet both are very good, nay both are abſolutely neceſſary. But to proceed,

*Fourthly*, Being upon this Argument of the means and inſtruments of Religion, you may be ſure I cannot omit the mentioning of another thing, as one of thoſe points that I would moſt ſeriouſly recommend to you, and that is the ſolemn obſervation of the Lord's Day.

I am not for laying ſtreſs upon the keeping of this day, or any other, more than the nature of the thing requires. I am ſenſible that the doctrine about the obſervation of the Sabbath, as it is delivered by ſome Men, is ſuperſtitious enough, and oftentimes, where it is believed, proves rather a ſnare to mens Conſciences, than of uſe to make them more Religious. Far therefore am I from deſiring you to be nice and ſcrupulous about the *Punctilio's* of the Lord's day ſervice. The Laws both of God and men have in that matter left a great deal to your own diſcretion, and the circumſtances you are in. But however thus much is neceſſary, that every man who profeſſeth himſelf a Chriſtian ſhould bear a conſtant Religious regard to the Lord's Day,

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by devoting it to ſpiritual uſes, more eſpecially the publick worſhip of God.

I do not much doubt of the truth of the obſervation which ſome good men have made, *viz.* That a man ſhall proſper much better both in his Spiritual and Temporal affairs, all the week after, for his careful obſervance of the Lord's day. And I am likewiſe of opinion that thoſe men have little or no ſenſe of Religion, that make no conſcience of ſanctifying that day, or that put no difference between it and other days. Sure I am, were there nothing of a divine command for the ſetting apart this day to Religious uſes (which yet I believe there is); yet it is one of the moſt prudent and uſeful Conſtitutions that ever was made. So that even upon that account, all men that have any honour for God, or zeal for the publick good, ſhould think themſelves obliged to obſerve it.

The benefits of it are indeed unſpeakable. Not to mention the Civil or Temporal conveniences of it; in truth to the keeping up the Religion of this day we owe in a great meaſure that the very Face of Chriſtianity hath hitherto been preſerved among us. And were it not for this, for any thing I know, moſt of us in a very few years would become little better than Heathens & Barbarians. And ſo great an influence towards the making men better, or at leaſt keeping them from grow-

growing worſe, hath this practice always had; that you may obſerve the moſt profligate men among us, who for their wickedneſs come to an untimely end, do generally impute their falling into thoſe ſins which cauſed their death, to their breaking the Sabbath, as they commonly expreſs it. But,

*Fifthly*, Let me upon this occaſion put you in mind of another thing, which by many of us is too much neglected. And that is, the taking all opportunities of coming to the holy Sacrament.

I have often ſpoken to you about this matter, and I now deſire to remind you of it. There are little hopes you will ever make any great progreſs in vertue and holineſs, till you can bring your ſelves to a frequent and conſtant participation in this holy Myſtery. Becauſe indeed this is the ſolemn Ordinance that Chriſt hath appointed for the conveying his grace to us, and inabling us to overcome our ſins, and grow daily in vertue and goodneſs.

I know we have generally many and inveterate prejudices as to this matter. But aſſure your ſelves they are meer prejudices and no good reaſons. Every man that means and deſigns honeſtly, and endeavours to lead his life as a Chriſtian ought to do, may certainly with as little ſcruple come every Month to the Communion,

as

as he may come every Week to ſay his Prayers or hear a Sermon. Nay, and I ſay further, if a man do not ſo lead his life, that he may approach to the Sacrament every Month, nay every Week, nay every Day, if there be occaſion; I am afraid that he doth not live ſo, as to be fit for it, tho' he comes but once in a year, or once in ſeven years. For the dueneſs of your preparation doth not depend upon your ſetting aſide ſo many extraordinary days for the forcing your ſelves into a Religious poſture of mind, but upon the plain natural frame and temper of your ſouls, as they conſtantly ſtand inclined to vertue and goodneſs. A man that ſeriouſly indeavours to live honeſtly and religiouſly may come to the Sacrament at an hours warning, and be a worthy Receiver. On the other ſide, a man that lives a careleſs or a ſenſual life may ſet apart a whole Week or a whole Month, for the exerciſing Repentance, and preparing himſelf for the Communion, and yet not be ſo worthy a Receiver as the other. And yet he may be a worthy Receiver too, provided he be really honeſt and ſincere in the matter he goes about; and provided that he remember his vows afterward, and do not ſink again into his former ſtate of careleſneſs and ſenſuality.

But to return to my point. I do verily think that moſt of the doubts and fears and ſcruples that

that are commonly entertained among us about receiving the Sacrament, are without ground or reason; and that every well disposed person that hath no other design in that action but to do his duty to God, and to express his belief and hopes in Jesus Christ, and his thankfulness to God for him, may as safely at any time come to the Lord's table, as he may come to Church to say his prayers. And if the case be so (as I believe it is) then of what a mighty priviledge and benefit do they deprive themselves, who when they have so many opportunities, do so seldom joyn in that solemn Institution of our Lord, which (as, I said) was design'd for no other purpose, but to be the means of our growing in grace and vertue, in love to God and to all the World.

O therefore my Brethren, let me beg of you not to be strangers at the Lord's Table. But I need not beg it of you, for I am sure you will not, whensoever it shall please God to put it into your hearts seriously to mind the concernments of your Souls, and to be heartily sensible of the need you stand in of the grace of Christ for the leading a holy and pure life.

I have but one thing more in the *Sixth* place, to leave with you, and I have done. It is not indeed of the nature of those things I have last recommended to you, that is, a means or instrument of growing more vertuous: but it is a

principal vertue by ſelf. And I do therefore recommend it to you, becauſe it is at all times uſeful, at all times ſeaſonable, but more eſpecially it ſeems to be ſo now: And that is, that you would walk in Love, and ſtudy Peace and Unity, and live in all dutiful ſubjection to thoſe whom God hath ſet over you, and endeavour in your ſeveral ſtations to promote the publick Happineſs and Tranquillity as much as is poſſible: But by no means upon any pretence whatſoever to diſturb the publick Peace, or to be any way concerned with them that do; by no means ever to ingage in any party or faction, and leaſt of all any faction in Religion, which is grounded upon a State-point.

I am ſorry the poſture of things among us gives me occaſion to mention this matter; but it is too viſible to what a height our animoſities and diſcontents are grown, and what the conſequences of them may be, unleſs there be a timely ſtop put to them, I tremble to think.

With mens differences as to their notions about the Politicks I am not concern'd; let men frame what *Hypotheſes* they pleaſe about Government, tho' I do not like them, yet I do not think my ſelf bound to Preach againſt them. But when theſe differences are come to that paſs, that they threaten both the Civil and Eccleſiaſtical Peace, there I think no Miniſter ſhould be ſilent.

Church-

Church-divisions God knows we have, and have always had too many, but it is very grievous that those who have always declared themselves the friends of our Church and enemies to Schism, should at this time of day, set their helping hand to promote a Separation.

And yet it seems to this height are our differences come. Some people among us that formerly were very zealous for the established worship of the Church are now all of a sudden so distasted with it, that they make a scruple of being present at our Service. Nay, some have proceeded so far as to declare, I know not upon what grounds, open war against us, and set up *Separate* Congregations in opposition to the *Publick*.

What is the meaning of this? hath *Schism* and *Separation* from the established Worship, which heretofore was branded as so hainous a sin (and deservedly too) so changed its nature all of a sudden, that it is become not only innocent but a duty?

Have we not the same Government both in Church and State that we formerly had? Have we not the same Articles and Doctrines of Religion publickly owned and professed and taught, without the least alteration? Have we not the same Liturgy, the same Offices and Prayers used every day that have always been? What is

there then to ground a ſeparation upon? Yes, *But the names in the Prayers are changed, and we cannot pray for thoſe that are now in Authority, as we could for thoſe that were heretofore.*

But how unreaſonable is this, when S. *Paul* has bid us to put up *prayers and ſupplications and interceſſions for all men*, eſpecially *for Kings and all that are in Authority*. Doth he make any reſtriction, any diſtinction what *Kings*, or what *perſons in Authority* we are to pray for, and what not? Doth he not expreſly ſay, we muſt pray for *all men, and for all that are in authority*? And doth not the reaſon of his exhortation imply as much, if his words did not? Namely, *that we may lead quiet and peaceable lives in all godlineſs and honeſty?*

But I pray conſider what this Doctrine leads to. If this principle be admitted to be good Divinity, then farewel all the obligations to Eccleſiaſtical Communion among Chriſtians. For what Government is there in the World that will not meet with ſuch Subjects as are not ſatisfied with it? and if that diſſatisfaction be a juſt reaſon to break Communion with the Eſtabliſhed Church, what Ligaments have we to tye Chriſtians together? What will become of *holding the Unity of the Spirit in the Bond of Peace?* What is the conſequence of this, but endleſs Schiſms and Separations?

But further, I wish these Persons would consider what an unaccountable humour it is, to make a Rent and Schism in the Church, upon a meer point of State.

Great Revolutions have happen'd in all Ages and in all Countries, and we have frequent instances of them in story. But I believe it will not be easily found that ever any Christians separated from the Church upon account of them. Still they kept unanimously to their Doctrine and their Worship, and never concerned themselves farther in the Turns of State (how great soever they were) than peaceably to submit to the Powers in being, and heartily to pray to God so to prosper their Government, and direct all their affairs, that all their Subjects *might lead quiet and peaceable lives under them in all Godliness and Honesty*. But when in a Revolution, a Prince was advanced to the Throne, that they looked upon to be a good man, and an encourager of the True Religion; in that case they did not only readily submit to him, but acknowledged it as the great blessing of God to them, that he had raised up such a Man to rule over them. This was the Notion, and this was the Practice of the Primitive Christians as to this matter, I may indeed say of the Christians in all Ages. And whatever you may have heard to the contrary, I doubt not to say that this is the

the very Doctrine of the Church of *England*.

Let me therefore exhort all of you to be followers of Peace; to promote publick Unity and Concord as much as is possible; to study to be quiet and mind your own business; to be more concerned for your Country and Nation than the Interest of any single man in it; heartily to submit to the Government; and not only so, but to thank God for the Blessings you enjoy under it, and most earnestly to pray for the Continuance of them: Lastly, never to espouse any party or faction against the Government, nor ever to be driven away from the Communion of the Church, of which you have always professed your selves members, by any of the pretences which some warm men may suggest to you. This I dare venture to say, how uneasie soever some of you now may be in joyning with our prayers, you will at last be ten times more uneasie in separating from us. For Faction has no bounds, and God knows whither it will lead a man at last. Were there nothing else but the Heat and Turbulency, the Passion and Peevishness, the bitter Zeal and Uncharitableness that the being of a Party doth naturally ingage men in: I say, were there nothing else but this, No man that consults the peace of his own mind, would for any consideration leave the publick Communion, and espouse the cause of a separate

Interest.

Intereſt. But there are worſe Conſequences than theſe, and I pray God we may never feel them.

And now I have done with my Exhortation. I have ſpoke my thoughts very freely to you. And I hope you will receive what I have ſaid with the ſame kindneſs that I meant it. And truely I have no reaſon to doubt of it, after ſo long an experience as I have had of your Civility and Candor. Indeed during all the time I have been among you (which hath been now near Sixteen years) I have been ſo kindly treated by you, and have received ſo many Teſtimonies of your Good-will, that I cannot but take this Opportunity of publickly acknowledging my Obligations to you, and returning you my Solemn Thanks for Them.

I cannot indeed ſay that I have done my duty as I ought, and I heartily beg of God to forgive all my defects. But I have this ſatisfaction, that I have ſincerely endeavoured in all my Preaching, to inſtruct you in the true doctrine of the Goſpel, and to teach you the right way that leads to Salvation. And I am ſo certain, that I have not been miſtaken my ſelf, nor miſ-led you in that matter; that I dare with Confidence addreſs my ſelf to you in ſome of the words of the Apoſtle, which do immediately follow after my Text: *Viz. Thoſe things which*

*you*

*you have learned and received and heard from me, do; and the God of peace shall be with you.*

I shall ever bless God for that Providence of his which placed me among you; and as I shall always, and do, earnestly desire all your prayers for me; so I shall always heartily pray for you. That God would guide and prosper you, that his good Providence would always watch over you for Good; that he would bestow upon you and your Children after you all sorts of Blessings needful and convenient for you; and especially that he would deliver you from every evil work, and preserve you to his Heavenly Kingdom. This God of his infinite mercy grant, *&c.*

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*FINIS.*